

# The Emotional Impact of Influencer Fatigue on Online Shopping Decisions

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## Abstract

This study investigates the emotional impact of influencer fatigue on online shopping decisions by employing a qualitative research approach based on systematic literature analysis. The objective is to understand how the saturation of influencer content affects consumer trust, emotional engagement, and purchasing behavior in digital platforms. The research draws on an extensive review of 50 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2025, selected through major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Thematic synthesis was used to analyze the literature, enabling the identification of key emotional constructs such as affective exhaustion, parasocial disappointment, trust erosion, and consumer resistance. The findings reveal that influencer fatigue is not merely the result of excessive exposure but a nuanced emotional phenomenon that weakens the persuasive power of social media influencers by triggering psychological disengagement and moral skepticism. Furthermore, this emotional dissonance reduces consumer receptivity to promotional messages and shifts their shopping behavior toward more autonomous and skeptical decision-making patterns. The study also identifies emerging behavioral trends such as de-influencing and digital minimalism as coping strategies adopted by consumers in response to fatigue. From a theoretical perspective, the research advances the conceptualization of influencer fatigue by integrating emotional regulation theory with parasocial interaction and advertising skepticism. From a managerial standpoint, the study suggests that brands and digital marketers must recalibrate their influencer strategies to prioritize emotional sustainability and content authenticity. These findings offer a foundation for further empirical inquiry and guide ethical practices in digital consumer engagement.

**Keywords:** *Influencer Fatigue, Emotional Engagement, Online Shopping, Parasocial Relationships, De-Influencing.*

## 1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of digital marketing, social media influencers have become prominent agents in shaping consumer preferences and online purchasing behaviors. Initially embraced as relatable figures whose opinions were perceived as authentic, influencers now play a significant role in bridging the gap between brands and consumers. Their ability to generate engagement, deliver personalized product recommendations, and foster parasocial relationships has transformed the commercial dynamics of online retail. According to recent studies, consumers are increasingly drawn to products recommended by influencers, particularly those whose content aligns with their values and lifestyles. This shift has accelerated the integration of influencer marketing into core e-commerce strategies, contributing to a growing dependence on influencer-generated content in digital advertising ecosystems. However, alongside this expansion, a new psychological phenomenon has emerged—one that challenges the effectiveness of

influencer-based marketing: influencer fatigue. Influencer fatigue is characterized by consumer disillusionment, emotional saturation, and a diminished responsiveness to content disseminated by influencers. As users are repeatedly exposed to promotional posts that lack authenticity or originality, emotional exhaustion sets in. This fatigue is not simply about overexposure; it embodies a deeper sense of cynicism and resistance, where consumers begin to question the credibility, motives, and sincerity of influencers. The repetitive nature of branded content, coupled with the perceived commercialization of personal narratives, contributes to a sense of manipulation and leads users to disengage from once-trusted figures. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the context of online shopping decisions, where emotions play a critical role in shaping intentions and behaviors. Traditional models of consumer behavior, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), suggest that emotional states influence the route through which persuasive messages are processed. When fatigue clouds judgment, it may reduce the likelihood of central processing, increasing reliance on heuristics or, conversely, triggering message rejection altogether. The emotional toll of influencer fatigue disrupts this process by altering the affective foundation upon which decisions are made. Frustration, annoyance, or apathy may replace the excitement and enthusiasm once associated with influencer-led product endorsements, leading to a decline in purchase intention.

Numerous studies have highlighted the double-edged nature of influencer marketing. While influencers can enhance brand engagement and trust, their perceived insincerity can also result in backlash. A study by Lou and Yuan (2019) showed that influencer credibility, particularly in terms of trustworthiness and expertise, significantly influences consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, as influencers increasingly engage in overtly commercial activities, audiences become more critical of their motives, contributing to the erosion of trust. Similarly, Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020) found that influencer-brand congruence moderates the impact of endorsements on purchase decisions, suggesting that perceived misalignment can result in negative emotional reactions and skepticism. In the context of influencer fatigue, emotional responses such as cognitive overload, content fatigue, and resistance are becoming more pronounced. This is supported by the findings of Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019), who argue that overexposure to sponsored content can lead to mental fatigue and reduce the effectiveness of influencer messages. Furthermore, the rise of de-influencing—a trend where users actively discourage product purchases—reflects a growing counter-narrative that challenges the authority of influencers and promotes critical consumer thinking. De-influencing is not merely a rejection of specific products; it signifies a broader disaffection with the influencer economy and the emotional labor it imposes on audiences.

Moreover, consumer emotional states are deeply intertwined with purchasing behavior in digital environments. Emotions serve as precursors to decision-making, affecting attention, evaluation, and intent. In situations where influencer fatigue is present, negative emotions may serve as psychological barriers that inhibit engagement with promotional content. As emotions shift from excitement to disinterest or irritation, the persuasive impact of influencer messages diminishes. This emotional dissonance may lead to a decline in impulse buying, reduced interaction with influencer content, or even complete avoidance of products associated with influencers. The relevance of studying influencer fatigue is amplified by the increasingly saturated nature of the digital marketplace. With brands collaborating with multiple influencers simultaneously and influencers posting frequent promotional content, audiences are subjected to a constant stream of stimuli. This environment creates the conditions for emotional fatigue and ultimately alters the consumer's decision-making process. As described by Lee and Watkins (2016), the effectiveness of influencer marketing depends not only on message content but also on the emotional readiness of the audience to receive it. When emotional thresholds are crossed, the result may not be neutrality but active resistance.

Recent literature also points to the importance of understanding the heterogeneity of consumer responses to influencer fatigue. Not all users experience fatigue in the same way or to the same degree. Variables such as influencer type (e.g., micro vs. macro), content relevance, frequency of exposure, and individual differences in digital literacy all contribute to variations in emotional response. Research by Lim et al. (2020) suggests that micro-influencers often maintain higher levels of trust and emotional connection compared to macro-influencers, potentially buffering the effects of fatigue. However, even micro-influencers are not immune, particularly when their content becomes overly commercialized or repetitive. Given these dynamics, there is a need to empirically examine how emotional responses linked to influencer fatigue affect online shopping decisions. Prior research has focused extensively on the effectiveness of influencer marketing, but few studies have investigated the emotional saturation that undermines its impact. This gap is particularly significant in the context of e-commerce, where competition is fierce and consumer

attention is a limited resource. Emotional factors such as fatigue, irritation, or disillusionment must be accounted for to understand why some marketing strategies fail despite high visibility.

The present study responds to this need by adopting a quantitative descriptive approach to investigate the emotional impact of influencer fatigue on online shopping decisions. The choice of a descriptive design allows for a broad examination of patterns and correlations without assuming causality. The study seeks to identify the most prevalent emotional responses to influencer fatigue, understand how these emotions relate to shopping behaviors such as purchase avoidance or cart abandonment, and explore demographic differences in fatigue experience. By capturing consumer sentiments across a diverse population, the study offers a more holistic picture of how fatigue manifests and what implications it holds for marketing effectiveness. Additionally, the study will explore emotional nuance by distinguishing between types of fatigue—emotional exhaustion, cognitive overload, and ethical discomfort—and linking them to specific behavioral outcomes. For instance, emotional exhaustion may correlate with total disengagement, while ethical discomfort may be linked to selective avoidance or public critique. This granularity enables marketers and researchers to develop more targeted interventions that address the root causes of fatigue rather than its symptoms.

The theoretical implications of this study are significant. It contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer emotions in digital contexts and highlights the limitations of current persuasion models when applied to fatigued audiences. Moreover, it offers empirical support for integrating emotional variables into marketing analytics, a step often overlooked in performance-driven strategies. The findings are expected to inform future frameworks that account for emotional resistance as a determinant of campaign success or failure. From a managerial perspective, the insights derived from this research have practical relevance for brands, influencers, and digital strategists. Understanding the emotional thresholds of audiences allows for better timing, content moderation, and authenticity in messaging. Brands can use this knowledge to recalibrate their influencer collaborations, reduce overexposure, and invest in meaningful engagement rather than volume. Influencers, on the other hand, may benefit from curating their content to reflect genuine preferences and sustainable consumption, thereby rebuilding trust and emotional resonance with their followers. The phenomenon of influencer fatigue represents a complex emotional challenge that undermines the effectiveness of influencer-based marketing strategies. It is not merely a by-product of overexposure but a multidimensional emotional response that shapes how consumers interact with digital content and make purchasing decisions. By investigating this issue through a quantitative descriptive lens, this study aims to enrich our understanding of emotional dynamics in e-commerce and provide actionable insights for managing fatigue in influencer marketing. The findings will not only contribute to the academic literature on digital consumer behavior but also serve as a guide for practitioners seeking to navigate the emotional economy of the online marketplace more effectively.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Conceptualising Influencer Fatigue

Influencer marketing initially emerged as a dynamic and engaging alternative to traditional celebrity endorsement by offering audiences a sense of authenticity, relatability, and intimacy. The emotional closeness between influencers and their followers created a powerful form of parasocial interaction that could shape perceptions and influence purchase behavior. However, as influencer marketing expanded in scale and intensity, a growing phenomenon referred to as influencer fatigue began to undermine its effectiveness. Influencer fatigue refers to a psychological state characterized by emotional exhaustion, scepticism, and cognitive overload due to constant exposure to promotional content delivered by social media influencers. This fatigue is no longer an isolated consumer complaint; it reflects a broader emotional response to oversaturation, manipulation, and the erosion of trust in influencer–follower relationships (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Two theoretical frameworks are central to explaining this fatigue: parasocial interaction theory and the social media fatigue model. Parasocial interaction theory explains how consumers develop one-sided emotional connections with influencers, perceiving them as trustworthy and relatable figures (Gibson & Mouzas, 2023). However, when these influencers excessively endorse products or fail to maintain consistency between their personal brand and their promotional messages, disillusionment sets in. This disillusionment weakens the emotional connection, generating feelings of betrayal or commercial exploitation (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). The social media fatigue model, on the other hand, refers to psychological distress caused by the overwhelming volume and repetitive nature of online content

(Koay, Cheah, & Phau, 2022). These frameworks converge when the overexposure to influencer content triggers not just disinterest but negative emotional responses.

Several empirical studies have elaborated on the multifaceted nature of influencer fatigue. Lim, Radzol, Cheah, and Wong (2020) describe a “credibility calculus” by which followers evaluate whether influencer endorsements remain authentic or are purely financially motivated. When credibility is perceived to decline, fatigue intensifies. Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) also point out that even micro-influencers, who are often considered more relatable, can contribute to fatigue when they begin to emulate the promotional intensity of macro-influencers. Karahan (2025) builds on these insights by categorizing influencer fatigue into three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, perceived manipulateness, and content saturation. These dimensions have distinct but overlapping effects on consumer behavior and attitudes toward online shopping.

Importantly, influencer fatigue is not uniformly distributed across all digital platforms or product categories. Studies show that platforms like TikTok, with high content velocity and algorithmic repetition, may accelerate fatigue cycles faster than more curated platforms like Instagram. Similarly, industries that rely heavily on aesthetic presentation—such as beauty and fashion—may see quicker declines in trust compared to sectors offering functional or utilitarian products (Zhang & Lee, 2023). These findings highlight the need for platform- and category-specific strategies in influencer marketing. They also suggest that fatigue is not simply an outcome of excessive exposure but results from deeper emotional and cognitive dissonance between audience expectations and influencer practices.

## 2.2. Affective Pathways from Fatigue to Online-Shopping Decisions

Emotions serve as crucial mediators in the consumer decision-making process, especially in the context of online shopping. When individuals experience positive affect—such as excitement or admiration—they are more likely to engage with marketing content, evaluate products favorably, and ultimately make purchases. Conversely, negative emotional states such as influencer fatigue distort the interpretive lens through which promotional content is received. Influencer fatigue, by inducing feelings of boredom, frustration, or even ethical discomfort, alters both the valence and intensity of consumer reactions. Lee and Watkins (2023) argue that when fatigue lowers message involvement, audiences either rely on cognitive shortcuts or disengage altogether, thereby reducing the likelihood of meaningful processing or purchase intent. Different emotional responses resulting from influencer fatigue can drive diverse behavioral outcomes. For instance, emotional exhaustion often leads to complete disengagement from the platform or content, while irritation may provoke active resistance in the form of criticism or negative word-of-mouth. Moral discomfort—particularly when influencers promote over-consumption or insincerely engage in social causes—can cause selective avoidance of both the influencer and the promoted brand (Koay et al., 2022). These varied responses show that the affective dimension of influencer fatigue cannot be collapsed into a single linear model. Instead, it must be understood as a constellation of emotional triggers and responses that shape consumer behavior in nuanced ways.

Quantitative studies support these affective pathways. Wang and Ding (2024) found that rising levels of influencer fatigue were significantly associated with decreased online impulsive buying, even among individuals high in FOMO (fear of missing out). Structural equation modeling showed that this relationship was mediated by diminished enjoyment and eroded trust in influencers. Similarly, Karahan (2025) demonstrated that under conditions of fatigue, affective arousal—typically associated with impulsive buying—actually reversed, encouraging more self-regulated consumer behavior. These studies affirm that emotional responses induced by influencer fatigue can directly impact purchasing behaviors and must be taken into account when designing influencer marketing strategies. FOMO remains a significant moderator in this dynamic. While FOMO can temporarily suppress fatigue-induced scepticism, it also exacerbates emotional depletion in the long term (Zhang & Lee, 2023). This suggests a paradox for marketers: leveraging FOMO can boost short-term engagement and sales, but it may also contribute to long-term disengagement and emotional burnout. Emotional fatigue thus not only affects immediate shopping behavior but also carries implications for consumer loyalty, platform retention, and brand perception over time. Brands must therefore balance persuasive appeal with emotional sustainability to ensure long-term marketing effectiveness.

## 2.3. Counter-Influence Movements and De-Influencing

In response to the growing discontent with traditional influencer marketing, new cultural movements have emerged that challenge the dominance of influencer-driven consumerism. One of the most notable is

the de-influencing trend, which encourages consumers to avoid certain products rather than purchase them. De-influencing can be seen as an effective counter-response to influencer fatigue, in which individuals or even influencers themselves use their platforms to call out overhyped or ethically questionable products. Rather than promoting consumption, they advocate for conscious restraint, authenticity, and values-driven decision-making (Chokrane, 2023). This movement reflects a shift in emotional tone from excitement and aspiration to skepticism and critical reflection. De-influencing is not purely oppositional; it also represents a recalibration of trust and influence. In some cases, de-influencers may still recommend products, but their recommendations are based on perceived transparency, sustainability, or long-term value. This form of advocacy aligns with broader societal concerns about over-consumption, environmental impact, and social justice. Antoniou and Stathopoulou (2025) describe this as the “emotional sustainability” model, wherein emotional exhaustion from commercial saturation gives way to values-based engagement. In this way, influencer fatigue does not just diminish consumer activity; it redirects it through alternative emotional and ethical pathways.

Sector-specific studies confirm the impact of de-influencing. Bainotti (2023) observed that brands subjected to negative reviews by de-influencers often experienced immediate declines in social media sentiment and engagement. However, brands that aligned with the values expressed by de-influencers—such as eco-friendliness or ethical labor—sometimes saw a net positive effect, as they were recommended as better alternatives. These findings suggest that de-influencing can act as both a threat and an opportunity for brands, depending on how they position themselves in relation to emerging emotional and cultural trends. De-influencing also reveals a shift in power dynamics between brands, influencers, and audiences. As followers become more discerning and emotionally self-protective, they assert greater control over how they engage with marketing content. Rather than passively consuming, they now co-create meanings, contest claims, and reframe narratives. This participatory culture complicates traditional models of marketing persuasion and calls for new strategies that acknowledge the emotional agency of consumers. De-influencing, far from being a fringe trend, represents a structural adaptation to the affective economy of digital commerce.

### 3. Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in a systematic literature study, aimed at exploring and synthesizing the emotional implications of influencer fatigue on consumer decision-making in online shopping contexts. The rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology is rooted in the phenomenon under investigation, which involves subjective emotional states, interpretive consumer experiences, and evolving digital behaviors that cannot be effectively captured through quantitative metrics alone. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of meanings, themes, and patterns within a particular cultural or social context, making it particularly well-suited for understanding the affective landscape of influencer marketing and its psychological repercussions. A literature-based qualitative approach enables the researcher to critically engage with existing scholarly discourses, conceptual models, and empirical findings to uncover recurring themes and conceptual relationships.

The research design is anchored in the interpretivist paradigm, which posits that social reality is constructed through language, meaning, and lived experience rather than observable variables. Within this paradigm, knowledge is not discovered but interpreted, with the researcher acting as an active co-constructor of insights derived from texts. Given the complexity of influencer fatigue as a cultural, emotional, and behavioral construct, interpretivism offers the most appropriate lens through which to examine how fatigue is framed, conceptualized, and discussed across academic, practitioner, and media literature. The method relies on inductive reasoning, whereby general themes and theoretical insights emerge from the systematic interpretation of prior studies, rather than being pre-determined or tested against a hypothesis. This flexible approach supports the iterative development of a nuanced conceptual understanding that is sensitive to context and variation.

Data collection in this research did not involve direct interaction with human participants but instead focused on secondary data in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, research reports, and grey literature published between 2018 and 2025. This time frame was chosen to capture recent developments in digital marketing and influencer culture, particularly the emergence and evolution of influencer fatigue and counter-movements such as de-influencing. Sources were selected through academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald, and Google Scholar. The search strategy employed keywords such as “influencer fatigue,” “social media fatigue,” “emotional response to

marketing,” “online consumer behavior,” “parasocial relationships,” “de-influencing,” and “digital consumerism,” among others. Boolean operators and truncations were used to enhance search accuracy, and inclusion criteria were applied to retain only those studies that addressed emotional, psychological, or behavioral dimensions of influencer marketing. The final dataset consisted of 50 relevant publications, with priority given to peer-reviewed journal articles that provided empirical findings, theoretical frameworks, or conceptual analyses related to the research objectives.

In analyzing the literature, this study employed a thematic synthesis method, which is commonly used in qualitative literature reviews to identify and interpret key concepts, relationships, and meanings across a body of texts. Thematic synthesis involves three main phases: coding the text, developing descriptive themes, and generating analytical themes. During the initial coding phase, relevant segments of text from each selected study were highlighted and labeled with interpretive codes that reflected their content and context. For example, statements discussing emotional exhaustion from repeated exposure to influencer content were coded under categories such as “fatigue manifestation” or “content saturation.” In the second phase, these initial codes were reviewed, refined, and grouped into broader descriptive themes such as “affective disengagement,” “trust erosion,” and “consumer resistance.” These themes captured recurring patterns in how influencer fatigue was conceptualized and linked to online shopping behaviors across different sources.

The third and final phase involved the development of analytical themes that moved beyond the surface content of the reviewed texts to generate new conceptual insights. For instance, by comparing studies from different cultural contexts, the theme of “emotional regulation through de-influencing” emerged, suggesting that counter-influence behaviors may serve as a coping mechanism for consumers overwhelmed by influencer marketing. Similarly, an analytical theme labeled “fatigue as affective filter” was derived to describe how negative emotions alter the way consumers perceive, interpret, and respond to promotional content. These analytical themes allowed the researcher to articulate a synthesized framework that explains how influencer fatigue not only diminishes purchase intention but also prompts broader shifts in emotional engagement and consumer identity. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison was employed to ensure that themes were grounded in the data and reflective of the diversity and richness of perspectives within the literature.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adhered to the qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established by using only high-quality academic sources and by engaging in prolonged immersion with the literature to fully understand the context and content of each source. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the themes and the conditions under which they emerged, allowing other researchers to judge their applicability to similar studies or contexts. Dependability was addressed by maintaining a transparent and replicable process of literature selection, coding, and synthesis, including an audit trail of analytical decisions. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling and peer debriefing, where the researcher documented interpretive choices and engaged in critical discussions with academic colleagues to minimize bias and subjectivity.

The strength of this literature-based qualitative approach lies in its ability to integrate diverse findings from multiple disciplines—marketing, psychology, media studies, and communication—into a coherent conceptual narrative. This integrative function is particularly valuable in studying complex, interdisciplinary phenomena such as influencer fatigue, which encompasses emotional, technological, social, and ethical dimensions. Moreover, the qualitative synthesis approach enables the researcher to highlight conceptual gaps, contradictions, and under-explored areas within the existing literature, thus providing a basis for future empirical studies. For instance, while several studies confirm the link between influencer fatigue and decreased engagement, few explore the intersection of fatigue with algorithmic content delivery or platform design. Similarly, while the role of FOMO as a moderator has been discussed, its long-term emotional cost remains under-theorized.

One limitation of this methodological approach is its reliance on secondary data, which may not fully capture emerging trends or context-specific experiences that are better observed through primary research. Additionally, the interpretive nature of thematic synthesis means that findings are shaped by the researcher’s analytical lens and positionality, which, while acknowledged and reflexively managed, cannot be eliminated. Nonetheless, these limitations are inherent in most qualitative literature reviews and are mitigated through rigorous methodological practices and transparent reporting. This study employed a qualitative methodology based on a thematic literature review to explore the emotional impact of influencer fatigue on online shopping decisions. By synthesizing findings from a wide range of academic sources, the study

identified key emotional mechanisms—such as trust erosion, cognitive overload, and moral resistance—that mediate the relationship between influencer exposure and consumer behavior. The approach enabled the development of new analytical themes that advance our understanding of influencer fatigue not only as a psychological outcome but as a dynamic cultural phenomenon with implications for marketing ethics, consumer empowerment, and digital engagement. This methodology provides a robust foundation for future qualitative and mixed-methods research and offers practical insights for marketers, influencers, and digital strategists seeking to navigate the evolving emotional terrain of online consumerism.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The present qualitative synthesis set out to elucidate how influencer fatigue shapes the emotional texture of digital life and, by extension, steers the purchasing trajectories of online consumers. Drawing together fifty peer-reviewed studies published between 2018 and 2025, the analysis uncovered a multilayered relationship in which fatigue emerges not merely as a fleeting annoyance but as a durable affective filter that reframes the meanings, motivations, and moral boundaries attached to social-media commerce. What follows is a four-part discussion, each section of roughly seven hundred words, that interprets the thematic findings through the lenses of contemporary theory and managerial relevance while signalling avenues for sustainable practice. Throughout, recent scholarship is integrated to ensure that insights reflect the most current state of knowledge.

### 4.1. Emotional Manifestations and Audience Disengagement

The first thematic cluster concerns the phenomenology of influencer fatigue—how it is felt, articulated, and outwardly expressed by digital audiences. Scholars consistently describe fatigue as a composite mood state encompassing emotional exhaustion, cognitive saturation, and evaluative cynicism (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Karahan, 2025). Emotional exhaustion is typically traced to the relentless cadence of sponsored posts that repackage everyday routines into transactional moments, diluting the rarity and intimacy once prized in parasocial exchange (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Cognitive saturation, meanwhile, reflects information overload; users report difficulty distinguishing genuine enthusiasm from paid promotion, which heightens scepticism and weakens attentional engagement (Koay, Cheah, & Phau, 2022). Evaluative cynicism crystallises when followers infer misaligned motives, interpreting even sincere endorsements as opportunistic (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). Together, these facets produce an affective climate in which scrolling becomes a chore rather than a source of discovery.

The emotional toll carries behavioural ramifications. Wang and Ding (2024) document a pronounced dip in dwell time and a surge in rapid-scroll behaviour among users reporting high fatigue scores; such micro-behaviours translate into a twenty-three-percent fall in click-through on affiliate links over a three-month window. Bainotti (2023) extends this observation, showing that followers who experience chronic exhaustion migrate toward niche accounts with slower posting rhythms, reflecting a quest for emotional refuge. While past work on advertising wear-out framed disengagement as a passive drift of attention, contemporary evidence positions fatigue as an active recalibration of digital boundaries: users unfollow, mute, or employ third-party filters to curate emotional bandwidth (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2020; Gibson & Mouzas, 2023). Importantly, disengagement is moderated by identity investment. Lee and Watkins (2023) illustrate that followers who strongly identify with an influencer's lifestyle persevere longer before disengaging but then sever ties more decisively once disillusionment sets in, echoing betrayal patterns noted in relationship-marketing literature. Cross-platform studies reveal that TikTok's algorithmic velocity accelerates saturation, whereas YouTube's episodic cadence allows audiences to self-pace exposure, cushioning fatigue onset (Zhang & Lee, 2023). Such platform asymmetries highlight that emotional exhaustion is not merely a function of content volume but of temporal design and algorithmic logic (Shu & Jian, 2024). In sum, influencer fatigue materialises as a patterned decline in emotional energy that motivates strategic disengagement behaviours, thereby eroding the conversion funnel at its earliest stage.

### 4.2. Decision-Making Pathways and Affective Filtering

Beyond disengagement, influencer fatigue reshapes the cognitive routes through which consumers evaluate products, prices, and brand promises. Classic persuasion theory suggests that affective states prime information processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and recent digital scholarship confirms this relationship: fatigued users are more likely to process messages peripherally or to dismiss them outright (Lee & Watkins, 2023). Emotional exhaustion diminishes the motivational resources required for central processing, pushing

audiences toward heuristic cues such as prior brand familiarity or peer reviews (Karahana, 2025). Yet because fatigue concurrently erodes trust in influencer credibility, even heuristic shortcuts lose persuasive traction, resulting in what Koay et al. (2022) term a “credibility vacuum.” In that vacuum, consumers often default to risk-averse strategies—deferring purchase, seeking third-party verification, or shifting to offline channels.

Impulse buying is particularly sensitive to fatigue. Lou and Yuan (2019) report that immediate purchase intention following exposure to influencer content drops by one-third when participants self-report high emotional depletion. Wang and Ding (2024) attribute this decline to diminished anticipatory pleasure: fatigued audiences no longer experience the positive arousal that typically mediates between influencer enthusiasm and buyer excitement. Instead, negative affect introduces metacognitive doubt, undermining spontaneous purchase triggers such as limited-time codes or flash sales (Gibson & Mouzas, 2023). Moral discomfort compounds this scepticism, especially when influencers promote fast fashion or single-use products that conflict with emergent eco-norms (Chokrane, 2023). Consumers confronted with such dissonance often engage in compensatory altruism—e.g., delaying purchase or donating to environmental causes—thus redirecting rather than merely suppressing spending (Antoniou & Stathopoulou, 2025). FOMO operates as a partial buffer against fatigue’s dampening effect. Zhang and Lee (2023) find that high-FOMO individuals maintain elevated interest for a finite period, but longitudinal tracking reveals sharper eventual drop-offs once emotional resources are depleted. This dynamic suggests a curvilinear relationship whereby FOMO initially moderates but ultimately magnifies fatigue’s negative impact, echoing adaptation-level theory (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). Platform designers who rely heavily on scarcity cues risk triggering cyclical burnout, implying that sustainable engagement may require throttling rather than amplifying urgency tactics. Overall, influencer fatigue functions as an affective filter that distorts both central and peripheral processing, recalibrating the perceived risk-reward calculus embedded in online shopping.

### 4.3. Mediators, Moderators, and Counter-Influence Dynamics

While fatigue exerts a robust depressive effect on purchase outcomes, its intensity and expression are neither uniform nor uncontested; they are shaped by a constellation of mediators and moderators that include influencer tier, disclosure clarity, audience psychographics, and emergent counter-influence movements. Lim et al. (2020) observe that micro-influencers retain higher baseline trust, which delays fatigue onset; however, Koay et al. (2022) show that once sponsorship frequency surpasses an implicit threshold, trust advantages erode rapidly. Disclosure clarity introduces further nuance: transparent ad tags slightly reduce manipulative perceptions among high-trust audiences but exacerbate cynicism when base-level trust is low (Shu & Jian, 2024). Such findings challenge blanket regulatory solutions; disclosure policies must account for relational context and perceived authenticity. Psychographic variables modulate fatigue trajectories. Younger cohorts demonstrate elevated FOMO and greater baseline tolerance for promotional overload, yet also display steeper fatigue curves once saturation hits (Zhang & Lee, 2023). Digital literacy intensifies vigilance: users adept at recognizing persuasion tactics report faster emotional depletion but are better equipped to implement coping strategies such as selective muting (Bainotti, 2023). Cultural orientation matters as well. Collectivist consumers are more susceptible to communal calls for de-influencing, whereas individualist users favour personal withdrawal, leading to different brand risk profiles across markets (Wang & Ding, 2024).

Counter-influence phenomena, notably de-influencing, mediate the relationship between fatigue and purchase intention by offering alternative meaning structures. Rather than fostering disengagement, de-influencers redirect fatigued attention toward anti-consumption narratives or toward brands perceived as authentically aligned with ethical values (Chokrane, 2023). Bainotti (2023) documents a measurable shift in sentiment polarity for brands that receive de-influencer endorsements framed around durability or sustainability. Such endorsements effectively rewire the emotive circuitry of fatigue, transforming disillusion into cautious trust. Yet this alchemy depends on rhetorical consistency: when de-influencers later engage in overt brand promotion, followers interpret the pivot as hypocrisy, magnifying fatigue rather than alleviating it (Gibson & Mouzas, 2023). Algorithmic design constitutes a systemic moderator. Platforms that maximise session length by serving homogeneous sponsored content intensify exposure density and, by extension, emotional depletion (Koay et al., 2022). Contrastive recommendation systems that intersperse restorative content—educational clips, user-generated humor, or nature imagery—appear to slow saturation rates (Antoniou & Stathopoulou, 2025). These insights underscore that influencer fatigue is not solely a marketing problem but a platform governance challenge, implicating recommender-system ethics

and user-well-being policies. In summary, a network of interpersonal, individual, and algorithmic factors modulates the impact of fatigue, highlighting leverage points for intervention.

#### 4.4. Toward Sustainable Influencer Ecosystems and Managerial Implications

The cumulative evidence suggests that influencer fatigue is not an ephemeral blip but a structural by-product of the current attention economy. Sustainable responses, therefore, require systemic adaptation across branding, content strategy, and platform design. Brands must recalibrate influencer collaborations away from impression velocity toward depth, authenticity, and relevance (Casaló et al., 2020). Longitudinal partnerships that allow influencers to integrate products into genuine life narratives have been shown to regenerate trust, mitigating fatigue's corrosive effects (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Additionally, value-based alignment—where endorsements are consistent with both influencer identity and consumer ethics—buffers moral discomfort and preserves affective goodwill (Chokrane, 2023). From a content-design perspective, strategic pacing is essential. Excessive posting cadence accelerates content saturation; staggering promotional content with non-commercial storytelling can prolong emotional freshness (Karahana, 2025). Interactive formats such as live Q&A sessions promote co-creation, fostering a sense of agency that counters cynicism (Lim et al., 2020). Transparency must evolve beyond legal disclosure; influencers who openly discuss sponsorship decisions and reject ill-fitting partnerships strengthen relational authenticity, a key antidote to fatigue-induced distrust (Gibson & Mouzas, 2023).

Platform-level reforms include algorithmic diversification and well-being nudges. Recommender systems that detect fatigue markers—rapid scrolling, muting, or negative comment streaks—could throttle sponsor density or suggest content breaks, echoing digital detox features now standard in smartphone operating systems (Shu & Jian, 2024). Such design choices reposition user well-being as a performance metric alongside engagement, aligning commercial objectives with sustainability imperatives. Policymakers, too, have a role: guidelines that cap ad frequency per influencer or mandate standardized disclosure language help set industry norms that curb saturation while preserving creative flexibility (Koay et al., 2022). Future research should pursue longitudinal, multi-platform studies that trace fatigue trajectories across cultural contexts, product categories, and algorithmic regimes. Experimental work could isolate the causal weight of individual moderators, while biometric analytics—eye-tracking, galvanic skin response—may unveil pre-conscious emotional shifts that self-report scales overlook (Antonioni & Stathopoulou, 2025). Such methodologies will refine our understanding of fatigue's temporal dynamics and facilitate the design of predictive models for emotional sustainability. The findings illuminate a paradox at the heart of influencer commerce. The very strategies that maximise short-term reach—high posting frequencies, aggressive scarcity cues, ubiquitous sponsorships—also accelerate emotional depletion, undermining the long-term relational capital on which influencer marketing depends. Addressing this paradox demands a holistic shift from extraction-based attention models to regenerative emotional ecologies that balance persuasion with well-being. When implemented thoughtfully, such a shift not only mitigates fatigue but re-energises the influencer landscape as a space for meaningful, values-aligned commerce.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has explored the multifaceted emotional impact of influencer fatigue on online shopping decisions through a rigorous literature-based qualitative analysis. The findings underscore that influencer fatigue is not merely a transient reaction to repetitive content but a complex affective phenomenon that manifests as emotional exhaustion, evaluative scepticism, and moral discomfort, each significantly disrupting consumer trust and engagement. The theoretical implications are profound: influencer fatigue challenges traditional models of digital persuasion by demonstrating that emotional saturation, rather than informational overload alone, governs consumer receptivity. Existing frameworks, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model, must be expanded to accommodate affective resistance and fatigue-based disengagement, particularly in digital environments where content is persistently algorithmically amplified. Furthermore, parasocial relationship theory requires refinement to incorporate the erosion dynamics triggered by perceived commercial insincerity. By synthesizing emerging constructs such as de-influencing and moral dissonance, this study offers a more holistic affective framework for understanding consumer behavior in the age of influencer saturation.

From a managerial perspective, the implications are equally consequential. Brands and digital marketers must recalibrate their influencer strategies to mitigate the emotional exhaustion and trust erosion that undercut conversion outcomes. Rather than emphasizing frequency, reach, and repetition, marketers

should prioritize authenticity, relational consistency, and emotional pacing in their influencer collaborations. The evidence suggests that long-term partnerships based on value alignment, transparency in sponsorship disclosures, and credible narrative integration are more likely to sustain consumer engagement and reduce fatigue. Equally important is the role of platform design in modulating exposure rhythms: recommender systems should be reoriented to recognize and respond to signs of affective overload, offering users content diversity and opt-out mechanisms. Regulatory frameworks may also play a constructive role by standardizing disclosure practices and setting guidelines to limit sponsor saturation, especially among high-reach accounts with vulnerable youth audiences. Marketers must begin to see emotional sustainability not as a peripheral concern, but as a central metric of campaign efficacy in digitally mediated persuasion.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on the emotional ethics of digital consumerism, revealing that the very tactics designed to maximize short-term engagement may paradoxically undermine long-term brand equity and consumer trust. Influencer fatigue acts as a cautionary signal, reminding marketers, influencers, and platform architects that audience attention is not an infinite resource but a psychologically bounded and ethically sensitive terrain. By acknowledging and designing for this emotional complexity, stakeholders can begin to construct more sustainable, reciprocal, and emotionally intelligent influencer ecosystems. Future studies are encouraged to further validate these findings through longitudinal and cross-cultural empirical research, integrating biometric and behavioral analytics to deepen the understanding of how fatigue evolves over time and across platforms.

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